SHAVED FIVE PRESIDENTS, NOW RETIRES WITH FORTUNE

Many Famous Men Called This Barber Their Friend and Jacob Hysler, Who Is to Rest After Sixty Working Years, Has Interesting Stories of Old Days to Tell

The trades are altogether like a necklace, and this barber is the chief pearl of the string.
He excelleth all that are endowed with skill, and under his hands are the heads of kings.
—Arabian Nights.

JACOB HYSLER, after sixty years of service at the Sign of the Striped Pole, retired last Wednesday in his eighty-third year that he might the better enjoy his $300,000 fortune.

Five Presidents of the United States, four Governors of this Commonwealth, other statesmen, politicians, scientists, jurists, financiers, hundreds and thousands of those whom the world counts great, were groomed for their part in the race of life by this dean of his brethren of the blade.

Twenty-three years owner of the barber shop at the old Windsor Hotel, now a charred memory; twenty years just closed at the Hotel Manhattan; other years in the lower city, Jacob Hysler has been in touch with men who have made history.

One who cares for the face of fame is bound sooner or later to be a celebrity on his own account. So many well known men know J. Hysler that when he speaks of his customers one feels that a living "Who's Who" is imparting its knowledge of men and affairs for the best part of a century.

Come, then, and take a look into the mirror of the master barber and learn what manner of beings there were on this island and how some still with us were when they were years younger, for he has had his discerning eyes upon them for many a decade.

Beginning as a little shaver, he served his apprenticeship to his trade near Washington Square. He was then about 16 years old and had only come a few weeks before from Steinbach, Hesse-Darmstadt, Germany, where on April 22, 1834, he was born. The shop in which he was employed belonged to a relative. It was at 9 Fourth avenue, not far from where Cooper Union now stands. For four years Jacob worked for his board and clothes and 25 cents a week. On being duly called a journeyman in 1855 he took employment in the establishment of one George Kemp, an Englishman, at Broadway and Ninth street, Kemp believed that he was further uptown than the city was ever likely to grow with any great success and wanted to sell out to some venturesome soul.

One day Jacob Hysler, who had the second of the two chairs which the place boasted, told a customer whom he was just finishing shaving that the shop was for sale.

"Well, why don't you buy it, Jacob?" asked the man in the chair.

"How can I?" was the response. "I am a young married man and earn only $6 a week."

"I'll lend you the money," observed the customer in an offhand way as he adjusted his stock.

The young journeyman kept his balance all right and within a day or so he was in possession of the furniture and good will for which he had given $600. His benefactor was Benjamin Robert Winthrop, member of one of the oldest families on Manhattan Island, whose ancestral home was in what was once a broad boulevard of fashion, Second avenue. This transaction was in the spring of 1857, and the following February Mr. Hysler paid back the loan in full and looked about for a chance to expand his business. It was a fine neighborhood on which his lines had fallen, for society was all about him. Washington Square was becoming a fashionable centre, and private residences in which dwelt the leaders of the commercial and financial circles of New York and of the social realm were stretching in well ordered rows to both east and west.

The centre of gravity of this little world was the staid old Brevoort House. The population increased and the shop soon had eight chairs. More and more like his prototype of Seville, Jacob Hysler became known as the barber of quality. The barber of New York, thence we shall call him, and so many were the innovations that he made, including unconversational barbers, that his name and fame went travelling all about the city. Many there were who came to make test of his razor and to sample the new unguents and pomata and bear's grease which he had especially prepared for a growing clientele.

In the archives of many families may be found faded photographs and daguerreotypes showing the manner of dressing the hair of the male of the species at this period.

Young men liked those parts at either side of the head which gave a roll like effect on the top of the skull. The hair was worn long and down into the neck. One of the first customers to enter the shop under the new management was a tall youth with locks in the fashion then approved.

"I shall never forget," said Mr. Hysler when a SUN reporter saw him the other day at his city home, 202 West Seventy-fourth street, "the first time I ever saw Joseph H. Choate. He was then living somewhere in Lafayette street and a very young lawyer he was, who had come here to make his way. He had remarkable hair then, a kind of reddish gold that stood up all over his head. He was certainly a bright man, and how he could talk! It was easy to see that he was going to make his mark. Years after that, when he had been abroad and had been an Ambassador, he came into my shop up town. And afterward I saw his son, tall and straight and with much the same look his father used to have.

"Hamilton Fish, who was then living over at Gramercy Park, often came to the shop. He was later Secretary of State, and a fine looking man he certainly was. In Second avenue and all through there right across the city to the west were the Winthrops, the Kernochans and the Taylors, for all of whom I was doing work. There was Mr. Lydig, a business man and a great scholar too, who was often a customer of mine. All of them treated me with much kindness and encouraged me in getting a start."

Mr. Hysler remained in the Ninth street shop until 1867, making a ten years tenure, and then followed the trend of business and social life to the north. He was at 409 Fourth avenue until 1873.

"It was in the new place in Fourth avenue," continued the dean, "that I saw much of the Roosevelt family, which lived in that neighborhood, although the Colonel did not come to my shop until I moved further up town. What a wonderful talker! When he begins to speak every barber near him keeps still and stops work. He always has something new on his mind, and the earnest way he says it makes everybody listen. He is certainly full of life and information."

Mr. Hysler rested his head on his hand and fell to musing over the notables who had been in his shop or had sat under the ministration of his deft fingers.

"Five Presidents of the United States," said he, "were customers of mine. Gen. Grant, Chester A. Arthur, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft. I have been told that President Wilson once came for a shave to the Manhattan shop, but of that I am not sure.

"Gen. Grant was the most unassuming man I ever met. He used to come in to have his beard trimmed. He was always so quiet and modest like that it was two years after he had been coming in there nearly every week before I realized that he really was the great soldier.

"I had the honor of attending Chester A. Arthur personally in the Fourth avenue shop, near which he lived. What a splendid figure of a man! His hair was heavy and he wore side whiskers. He was always dressed in the latest fashion, and he had such dignity and such elegance of manner, and was so considerate at the same time, that it is a great pleasure always to think of him.

"When I went to the newly opened Windsor Hotel in 1873 I had so much to do in taking in cash and looking after other details that I did not do any more barber work myself. That is the reason why in later years I did not have the opportunity to give my personal services to customers. It happened in this way that, of the Presidents who were at my shops, I had myself looked only after Mr. Arthur.

"And right here let me say that the proudest moment of my life came to me one day at the Manhattan, when Mr. Hawk, the proprietor then, told me that the President wished to see me. I went up to the apartments and there stood, face to face, with Major William McKinley. He had sent for me not as his barber, but as his 'old friend, Hysler.' So for ten or fifteen minutes there in his apartments the President of the United States and I, Jacob Hysler, barber, talked as man to man. There are times in the life of everybody which come back to him always with a thrill, and those few minutes with one of the great men of his day meant more to me than I can express.

"Mr. Taft is a fine man, so good natured, so full of humor and always with a smile on his face—a great big, warm hearted person he is, and everybody is glad to see him.

"Of the Governors of this State four often came, Governors Cornell, Flower, Odell and Whitman. Often in the summer, when business was light, as so many of my customers would be away from the city, I had a shop at the United States Hotel in Saratoga and there I often had the pleasure of a talk with Gov. Flower."

Mr. Hysler has many recollections of the brokers and the financial leaders who years ago foregathered at the Windsor and started there a night edition of Wall Street in busy seasons.

"The late Jay Gould often got shaved at the Windsor and years later all his sons. Edwin Gould was one of my customers until I turned over the shop at the Manhattan to my successor.

"Then there were William H. Vanderbilt and his sons and his grandsons. The Messrs. Rockefeller often came, especially William Rockefeller, and sometimes John D. would drop in for a shave. When I was coming back to this country on the steamship Deutschland and was walking the deck one morning, I heard a voice calling "Come, and sit with us, Hysler," and a few minutes later I was in a chair between John D. Rockefeller and Whitelaw Reid, then Ambassador to Great Britain, both customers of mine.

"Now let me see, what other well known men were at my shop. Oh, yes, Andrew Carnegie! What a merry, twinkly, little gentleman, what a fine, ringing laugh! He is a very happy man, I should say. He used to have his beard trimmed often in my shop. And another cheerful man is Chauncey M. Depew, who often called in at the Windsor. He wears side whiskers which are always arranged with the greatest care.

"The late William C. Whitney, one of my best customers, was one of the most generous men I ever knew. I sent him a barber every day, for which service the charge was $18 a month. He gave the journeyman $10 a month extra and always on June 1 presented him with a check for $100, telling him to take his wife and children to go for a vacation of a couple of weeks."

Among the financiers who were shaved in the shop of Mr. Hysler were E. H. Harriman and Charles M. Schwab."

"You probably received some very valuable information from your friends of Wall Street," I suggested.

"I never took any of it," was the reply. "Once I did take a little flyer in the Street. Put up $3,000 and lost all that and $1,500 besides. Everything looked all right and I thought once that I was $5,000 ahead of the game."

Turning from the tale of his shearling with the lambs to reminiscence, Mr. Hysler drifted into the domain of journalism.

"To the newspapers I was always very grateful," said he, "for newspaper men have always been a great help to me. I am especially proud of having had in my chairs some of the ablest journalists this country has ever seen. Charles A. Dana of THE NEW YORK SUN was often coming in. The late William Cullen Bryant, the editor of the New York *Evening Post*, used to have his beard trimmed. His beard was very white and silky and his hair was snowy. His profile was noble and his face appeared all the more striking on account of the wonderful whiteness of his hair. Henry J. Raymond of the New York *Times* was a strong character. His hair was thick and glossy. James Gordon Bennett the younger I often shaved when he was a student. Joseph Pulitzer, founder of the New York *World*—he had a rich brown beard and a very strong face—often patronized me. He bought neckties of me also, often three at a time. It was due to Manton Marble, the editor of the *World* many years ago, that I got my shop in the Windsor. He wrote a letter of recommendation which was of great value."

Mr. Hysler has in his mental picture gallery the likenesses of many of those who took so active a part in the political destinies of the city. Mayor Mitchel, he says, often visited the Manhattan Hotel shop.

"Years ago, when Richard Croker was a young contractor," he observed, "and just beginning to do well, I became well acquainted with him and he has always remembered me most kindly, often he would offer me the use of his carriage for a Sunday, and although I never accepted the courtesy it made a deep impression on me."

Among the Republican party leaders the late Thomas C. Platt was often shaved at the Manhattan.

Mr. Hysler was asked what he thought was the main characteristic of the men of affairs with whom he had come in contact in his business life.

"It may be," answered Mr. Hysler, "that a barber learns to know men better than do those in some other callings. From my study of men at close range I should say that the bigger a man is in character and ability the less frills he puts on.

"It has happened that most of my customers had wealth and high standing, and yet I never knew men who were more democratic, more considerate, more unlikely to stand on their dignity than were they. There were 400 customers a day in the shop, and it was impossible for me to remember so many of the new faces. I shall never forget the many pleasant hours though I have spent through meeting men who were so kindly in thought and in deed."

Mr. Hysler was asked how he had made such a success of his barber shop.

"That is simple enough," he said. "I realized that to get a high class trade and hold it the barber must have tact. One hears a great deal about the gossip of barbers and their talkativeness. I made it a rule when I started business that no barber working for me was to speak to a customer unless he was spoken to and even then he was to answer questions civilly and fully but not air his opinions. Most men don't like to talk when they are in a barber shop.

"Another of my rules was that no barber should ever urge on a gentleman to have shampoos and tonics or anything else. Men who go to first class shops are able to make up their own minds as to what they want. Let them do it.

"Also, I don't permit any barber to tell people that there is any such thing as a hair restorer. Once hair goes it cannot be brought back. A simple dressing and massaging the scalp will help save what hair is left, but that is all that can be expected. A tight, dry scalp means baldness. Hair dyes I would not let any one use in my shop. Dyeing the hair never deceived any one, and barbers should not urge anybody to try it.

"The way to succeed in the barber shop is to pay strict attention to business and to see that every man goes away suited with the service. There cannot be too much care given to cleanliness and neatness, in the shop itself and in the personal appearance of the barbers, the manicurists and the attendants. As one of the pioneers of the up to date sanitary shop I have always been greatly interested in anything that makes the shop cleaner, brighter and more attractive.

"Back of all this, however, is the skill of the barber himself, who must shave with a delicate touch. When a man has that he can be sure of getting along without complaint from customers."

Mr. Hysler was one of the first barbers in the country to introduce a line of collars, cuffs and other furnishing goods for men. Owing to the fact that there were few haberdashery establishments in Fifth avenue when his shop was at the Windsor he added considerably to his profits by that venture.

Now that he has retired completely from active business he intends to enjoy life as a free man should. He has a farm near Hicksville, L. I., and two automobiles, so that in pleasant weather he will find much recreation in the open air. He has parcels of real estate here and there and bonds in the safe deposit vault, and money in the bank. Above all he prizes the memories of his contact with the men who have borne so prominent a part in the upbuilding of the municipality and the nation.

O. HENRY'S LETTERS TO LITTLE GIRL NEXT DOOR

THIS has been a year rich in the publication of facts about the life of O. Henry. At the time of his death six years ago it was amazing how little was known to the public about so popular a writer. After his death a sort of myth grew up. But now at last come books which do much to explain his personality, his reticence and his work. O. Henry was once asked why he did not read more fiction. "It is all tame," he replied, "as compared with the romance of my own life."

So we discover when we read C. Alphonso Smith's "O. Henry Biography" (Doubleday, Page & Co.). There is pictured the little freckle faced boy who in a North Carolina village loved to play Ku Klux and to invent hair raising adventures to live amidst; there is pictured the quiet, sensitive youth who worked for five years in his Uncle Clark's drug store and sketched the drug store constituency with his pencil; the young man, driven by delicate lungs to Texas, reacting to ranch life; the first breaking into print, journalistic experiences, the bank clerk, the young husband and father, the charge of embezzlement and the catastrophe; the wanderings through the South and Central America, the return and three years in prison; the prisoner's false sensitiveness and his resolution to sign an assumed name; his coming to New York, his understanding of the "four million," his rise to fame—all this reveals why O. Henry considered most fiction tame, and it also reveals why his fiction is not tame.

There is a chapter in this biography called "The Shadowed Years" which is going to be read and quoted much and which is going to make O. Henry more admired and beloved than ever. Then there is another illuminating book which has just been published. It is called "Wind of Destiny" (Doubleday, Page), and is written by Sara Lindsay Coleman, O. Henry's second wife. Mrs. Porter's story is fiction, but there are several letters in it which are not fiction. She herself says:

"The letters in this story are real letters. I know this because they were written to me by the man the world knows as O. Henry, author, and only as the author. Not half a dozen people knew the real Sydney Porter, and the man was greater than the author. There are other letters which are mine own, and no other eyes shall see them. But the letters in this book were not written to me as a woman, but rather to the little girl of his memory who lived next door to him in the street of Yesterday.

"The background for the letters is pure fiction. Maybe I have let more of myself creep into this tale than I had planned. If this be true, the reason is that my whole thought centred upon revealing Sydney Porter to the lovers of O. Henry."

Mrs. Porter has only changed the proper names; but it doesn't make much difference that Sydney Porter is printed "Robert Haralson," nor that "Miss Sallie" is printed "Miss Carrie," nor that the little North Carolina town of Greensboro is printed "Roseboro."

Here is one of the first letters, written from Waverly place:

"MY DEAR MISS CARRIE:

"I was gladder to get your little note than the biggest editor's check I ever saw. Seems to me (after trying very hard) I do remember a small 'sassy' girl that used to live next door.

"When you ask if I remember you, it reminds me of a story told of Congressman John Allen of Mississippi—(never could spell Mississip)—Is that right? A lady approached him in Washington one day and held out her hand. 'Now, confess, Mr. Allen,' she said, 'that you've forgotten all about me.'

"He had; he knew her face, but his memory wouldn't serve him any further. But, with a low bow, he replied: 'Madam, I've made it the business of my life to try to forget you.'

"See?—as we New Yorkers say.

"Well, well, how time does fly! as the little boy said when his teacher told him Rome was founded in 684 B. C. I never expected anything so nice and jolly as to hear from you. It's like finding a five dollar bill in an old vest pocket.

"Isn't it funny that I was thinking of you a little while last week? I had a map, looking all about on it trying to decide on somewhere to go for a few weeks to get away from the city. Mountains for me always! So my eye naturally ran down the Blue Ridge chain. Here's the latest picture of the distinguished Mr. Haralson. Does it look anything like the moonstruck little shrimp that used to hang around and bother you so much? I can remember what an awkward, bashful, sentimental, ugly, uninteresting nuisance I was then. No wonder I couldn't make any impression on you! I've improved a good deal since. In fact, it seems to me that the older I grow the better looking and more fascinating I become. Of course it doesn't seem just right for me to say so, but if I didn't tell you you mightn't ever find it out.

"In those days I took life mighty seriously and sentimentally; that's why I always went about looking like a monkey with the toothache; but in after years I learned that life is only a jolly good comedy for the most part, and I began to enjoy it. I believe I'm about five years younger than I was the last time you saw me—when you left the depot in Roseboro for Marsville. Ernest Cold rode up with you on the train; and I haven't forgiven him for it yet.

"It's mighty nice of you to say you would be able to stand seeing me again if I should come to Marsville. I shore would love to ride up and holler 'Hello!' over the fence. Lemme see! Trip to Europe—automobiles—steam yacht—Rockefeller's money—no, none of those things sound half as good. But lawsy me! I don't know when I shall ever drap down your way.

O. Henry.

"I've about decided to go up along the Maine coast fishing with an editor man. I live in a room or two as big as a barn on Waverly place. I'm so lazy and cool and contented there all by myself with my books and things that I haven't been away from town in two summers.

"Now, I'm not going to talk about myself any more. I've been in New York about four years and I guess I've 'made good,' for everything I write is engaged long before it is written.

"I've been puzzling over your signature. It's the same old name you had when you wore your hair in a plait; and I have two very good reasons for thinking it ought to be different. One is that somebody wrote me several years ago that you had married; and the other is that it isn't possible—it isn't *possible*—that the young men of our old State could be so unappreciative as to have let you escape. But if you are married, please, oh, please get a divorce at once so you can be 'Miss Carrie' again.

"I am trusting to your good nature to accept a little book of mine that came out last winter. You don't have to read it, you know. It's just the thing to prop the kitchen door when the wind is in the east.

"And, Miss Carrie, some day when you ain't real busy won't you sit at your desk where you keep those antiquated stories and write to me? I'd be so pleased to hear something about what the years have done for you and what you think about when the tree frogs begin to holler in the evenings. Got any tree frogs up there?"

And here is another letter in which O. Henry expressed that he believed it good for writers to live in New York:

"MY DEAR MISS CARRIE: Never thought you were going to stir up so much trouble when you did me that big favor of writing a 'hello' to me across the mountains, did you? Well, please let me write this time and if it's too much give me the teeny weenyest bit of a hint and I'll turn my pen into a sword and cut it all out.

"Was it cheeky of you to write to me? My dear Miss Carrie, I don't know exactly what the unpardonable sin is, but if you hadn't written I'd feel awfully anxious about your future.

"Right here let me assure you that I'm not one of these confirmed correspondents. Hand on my heart! I vow I haven't written two pages at a time to anybody in years and years. My closest friends complain that I don't even answer letters. But when I hear from—oh, you forbade that, didn't you?

"Don't chain up your impulses, dear friend; let 'em skallyhoot around. We don't live more than nine times, and bottles and chains weren't made for people to confine and tie up their good impulses with.

"Think I'm foolish? Oh, no, I'm not. One can have an ideal if one wants to. I've had one for—years. All I've had since have busted and gone up the flume. Please, Miss Carrie, lemme keep that one. I ain't going to bother you about it. You say those old days are laid away between lavender scented sheets. I can understand that for you. Mine are not. They are fresh and fragrant, dewy and everlasting. I'm not going to insist upon your believing it—shake your head if you want to—and give the sun a chance to brighten his rays. I'm superior to luck, fate, history and time. If I choose to stand under a certain window yet in Roseboro and sigh for the unattainable, no one shall balk me. So don't you try to bulldoze me, Miss Caroline Howard. If my spirit elects to wander there, please you let it alone.

"Do you know that over there in the ridge of blue and gold you are the most splendidly endowed of all the daughters of the gods? Why? Because my memory tells me that you have (to my memorial eye and mind) all that can be conferred of loveliness; and, according to your boast, you have a new and delectable way of fixing tomatoes. Now, I adore tomatters. I could die for 'em, I nearly have several times. You can't imagine how interested I was in your tomato garden. In your tomato garden. Say—I believe you promulgated some nonsense in your letter about whether I stood under Fifth avenue girls' windows about midnight and sent up flowers and candies. Why, lemme tell you, Miss Carrie, I've seen 'em and talked to 'em, and had tea with 'em, and lemme tell you—I'd rather set out sit across a little table with you and have a tomatter between us with ice and——

"Say—I don't agree with you about the nuts. Why, I never saw a tomatter in my life stuffed with nuts. Air they good? The ice sounds all right. And lemme tell you—I think you're wrong about the Mayonnaise dressing.

(Continued on Tenth Page.)